

Continuity and Renewal in Liturgical Studies: An Introduction

Paul van Geest, Marcel Poorthuis and Els Rose

1 Gerard Rouwhorst and the Development of Liturgical Studies

In 2010 a book was published by Dutch liturgists that attracted international attention: *Patterns and Persons: A Historiography of Liturgical Studies in the Netherlands in the Twentieth Century*.¹ The volume, co-edited by Gerard Rouwhorst, describes the twentieth-century history of the liturgical movement in the Netherlands, in both the Catholic and the Protestant Churches, as well as the relation between liturgy on the one hand and the arts and architecture on the other. Included were also critical observations and reflections on the discipline of liturgical studies and its perspectives as such. The third part of the book includes biographical sketches of Dutch scholars who either played an active role in the liturgical movements in the Netherlands after Vatican II, among whom Herman Wegman, or who were sceptical about the liturgical innovations in the Catholic Church in the post-Vatican II period, like Christine Mohrmann and Frits van der Meer.

It is true, the scholar to whom the present volume is dedicated, never presented himself as a pioneer in new liturgical developments as his mentor and predecessor Herman Wegman did, although both were trained as scholars in the field of the history of liturgy. Nor has he expressed himself critically and in the spirit of Mohrmann and Van der Meer on developments in the liturgy after Vatican II. Yet, his contribution to the domain of liturgical studies over the past decades has been, and still is, highly significant. During his dissertation research on developments in the Easter liturgy in Nisibis and in the first Christian kingdom of Edessa on the basis of the paschal hymns of Ephrem of Nisibis, Gerard Rouwhorst walked a path different from the one chosen by his predecessor. In his first book, based upon this research, Rouwhorst clearly shows that his research is aimed at describing in detail the developments in specific liturgical traditions as they appear from the sources.²

- 1 L. van Tongeren, M. Barnard, P. Post, G. Rouwhorst ed., *Patterns and Persons: A Historiography of Liturgical Studies in the Netherlands in the Twentieth Century*, Liturgia Condenda 25 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010).
- 2 G. Rouwhorst, *Les Hymnes pascales d'Ephrem de Nisibe: analyse théologique et recherche sur*

Rouwhorst's findings were internationally considered as a solid contribution to a rather neglected area of liturgical studies. Thus, Paul Bradshaw recently offered the following assessment of a number of Rouwhorst's contributions:

[...] credit should be given in particular to Gerard Rouwhorst for attempting to persuade us to look differently at Christian liturgical traditions on the basis of their particular point of origin, and thus correct our misapprehensions.³

Furthermore, Bradshaw pointed out that Rouwhorst's research had led to a more nuanced understanding of certain liturgical developments:

Indeed, Rouwhorst has rightly argued that even making a distinction between churches with Jewish roots and those with Gentile origin is too simplistic a categorization: there are likely to have been intermediate forms, as for example, churches that were Gentile in origin but having hardly any affinity to Pauline theology and for one reason or another still being open to Jewish influences. Rouwhorst has shown how such an approach helps to explain a number of divergent phenomena in early Christian liturgical practice.⁴

That Rouwhorst deliberately chose this direction is evident from the contribution he made to the *Liber amicorum* for Wegman, published in 1990. He opens his article by noting that in the years prior to 1990

[...] plusieurs liturgistes, parmi lesquels il faut compter Herman Wegman, ont plaidé en faveur d'un élargissement de l'horizon dans la recherche sur l'histoire de la liturgie. Ils ont—à mon avis à juste titre—appelé l'attention sur les limites qu'a l'approche 'classique' [...] [I]ls ont souligné le fait que cette approche concernait trop exclusivement la liturgie 'officielle' telle qu'elle est décrite et prescrite dans les sources liturgiques normatives.⁵

l'évolution de la fête pascale chrétienne à Nisibe et à Edesse et dans quelques églises voisines au quatrième siècle, 2 vols., Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

3 P. Bradshaw, "Jewish Influence on Early Christian Liturgy: A Reappraisal", International Council of Christians and Jews, at <<http://www.jcrelations.net/Jewish+Influence+on+Early+Christian+Liturgy%3A+A+Reappraisal.3217.o.html?L=3>>, last consulted 29 September 2016.

4 Ibid.

5 G. Rouwhorst, "La célébration de l'eucharistie selon les Actes de Thomas", in *Omnes circumstantes: Contributions Towards a History of the Role of the People in the Liturgy: Presented to*

Rouwhorst himself gave shape to the broadening of the horizon of liturgical studies by focusing his attention on texts such as the *Acts of Thomas*, texts that were initially ignored by liturgists but nonetheless provide relevant information on liturgical matters, such as the nature of and the manner in which the Eucharist was celebrated according to the text, and how it was experienced by the faithful present. It is precisely in this broadening of research areas that one is able to discern Rouwhorst's search for nuance. His painstaking research into texts, using his philological skills combined with a great knowledge of the liturgical and theological notions that developed in the first centuries CE, led to important results. Thus, Rouwhorst has acquired a status in his own right in the research field of liturgical studies over the past decades.

In order to achieve a broader perspective on liturgical developments, one of the first steps consists of acquiring a wide range of languages. Next to Greek and Latin, lesser known languages such as Coptic, Syriac, Old-Slavonic, Armenian, and Arabic have traditionally been part and parcel of liturgical scholarship. Later, methods from the social sciences, such as ritual studies, and anthropological theories were added to the skills a liturgist should master. Last but not least, liturgical studies have benefited from the rediscovery of the encounter with other religions, especially Judaism. Gerard Rouwhorst unites all these skills and approaches in his person in an exemplary way. Although he has never ceased to go *ad fontes* since his PhD research, he studied textual sources with a comparative method, comparing, almost according to the hermeneutics of Dilthey, key passages with each other: to obtain not just a clear insight into the differences but also into certain developments in the history of liturgies or liturgical prayer. His impressive list of publications shows familiarity with many languages, among which the Syriac language takes pride of place.

While texts and a thorough understanding of their linguistic characteristics have traditionally been the core tools in each liturgical scholar's kit, Gerard Rouwhorst enriched his approach to the history of liturgy by implementing methods he learned from anthropologists and scholars representing the emerging field of Ritual Studies. His interest in the ritual theories of Mary Douglas and the application of performative theory to ritual studies by Victor Turner, to mention only two scholars that inspired Rouwhorst, enabled him to develop a deeper understanding of early Christian and medieval ritual practices. In this, Rouwhorst never limited himself to these specific historical approaches. If he showed himself indebted to the anthropological approach first in his work on the baptismal rituals of the medieval Church, he extended

Herman Wegman on the Occasion of his Retirement from the Chair of History of Liturgy and Theology in the Katholieke Theologische Universiteit Utrecht, ed. Ch. Caspers and M. Schneiders (Kampen: Kok 1990), 51-77, at 51.

this approach by including also other ritual practices in a wide variety of historical periods, including the present. Moreover, he never gave up studying texts and textual traditions next to ritual developments, thus combining both elements that shape the Christian liturgy in its essence in a way that is rather exceptional. Rituals of purity, initiation rituals, phenomenological studies of feast and cults show up in his bibliography next to analyses of reading practices and, until the present day, studies on 'his' Syriac poet Ephrem.

Although Gerard Rouwhorst spent his academic career as a professor of liturgical studies, he never confined himself to Christian traditions. Instead, he took an active part particularly in the dialogue between Christianity and Judaism in which, again, he chose the perspective of the *longue durée*. He studied the relation between Jewish and Christian faithful and their ritual practices for the period of (late) Antiquity and the Middle Ages just as well as for the more recent past. While his scholarly work focuses on the relation between the origins of the Christian liturgy and Jewish cults and practices, through his academic career he also took an active part in spreading knowledge about the Jewish tradition among modern day Catholics, for instance through his work for the Katholieke Raad voor Kerk en Jodendom (KRI, Catholic Council for Church and Judaism).

Gerard Rouwhorst's contribution to the field of Liturgical Studies has given the domain a new relevance, paradoxically in a time in which the topic of liturgy gradually became less central to academics and ecclesiastics than it was during the heyday of the Liturgical Movement. As a historian, Rouwhorst distinguishes himself through his awareness of the prejudices that scholars bring to their field. This is utterly relevant for the study of many historical periods and phenomena. As Paul Bradshaw underlines, Rouwhorst's work is exemplary in its sensitivity to how our modern biases influence our view on the past, or, to use Bradshaw's own words: how our conclusions shape the evidence.⁶ As a liturgical scholar, Rouwhorst made his mark through his exceptionally versatile methodological approach. In the way he combined a traditional textual approach with insights derived from the social sciences, the results of well over three decades of liturgical scholarship are of lasting relevance to the field.

In his analysis of the word 'scripture' the Finnish theologian Heikki Räisänen stated: "Scripture is a relational concept: a work cannot function as scripture without a community which considers it holy."⁷ What is true for scripture, is

⁶ See Bradshaw's contribution to the present volume.

⁷ A. Voiteda and J. Jokiranta ed., *Scripture in Transition: Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 126 (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2008), 687-702, esp. 688.

particularly true for liturgical texts, which aim at intensifying an awareness of the sacred in a community of interpretation and communication (Habermas), as a Christian community is. In his research, Rouwhorst shows a strong awareness of this specific function of liturgical texts in a community.⁸ Hence, it seems appropriate to honour this outstanding scholar with a collection of liturgical studies, in which the three main domains of his interest are central: Text, Rituals, and Encounters.

2 Texts

The section ‘Texts’ opens with the contribution by Paul Bradshaw in which he raises the question as to how preconceived assumptions, with regard to the development of liturgical rites in the early Christian centuries, in many cases guide the researcher’s evaluation of evidence. With the help of the notorious case of Hippolyte as the presupposed author of the *Apostolic Tradition*, Bradshaw shows that this traditional and uncritical attribution has stamped our image of liturgical life in the third century for decades. The presence of the Eucharistic prayer in the *Apostolic Tradition* raised occasional doubts, as there had been no evidence for any epiclesis prior to the fourth century. Likewise, the collective imposition of hands at ordination, as described in the work, cannot be documented in any early source. Hence, allowance for discontinuity and possible interpolations should guide our present understanding of this document.

Choosing the perspective of liturgical texts as performed in relation to rituals of death and burial, Martin Klöckener studies the period of late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages as an age of transition in which a shift in emphasis on the meaning of death can be discerned. Klöckener compares the oldest Roman funerary prayers with those from later Frankish provenance. It turns out that the sacrificial dimension in the latter texts shifts towards an approach that can be qualified as *do ut des*: God should grant to the deceased salvation in exchange for the Eucharist as a gift from man to God. The older Roman assurance of salvation becomes less certain when compared with the material from the Frankish prayer books, where the eschatological expectation is more filled with fear and doubt.

⁸ See W. Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7 (Stuttgart-Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1958²), 232; W. Dilthey, “Die geistige Welt. Einleitung in die Philosophie des Lebens 1,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5 (Stuttgart-Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1957²), 317, 329-330.

Three contributions in this first section deal with the close connection between narrative texts and liturgical practice. Marcel Poorthuis focuses on the topic of Noah's Ark and the considerable role it played in Eastern Christianity. Poorthuis draws upon narrative traditions with regard to the Ark in order to show their relevance for liturgical practice. The narrative tradition of the housing of Adam's body in Noah's Ark, featuring in the Syriac re-telling of the biblical stories known as the *Cave of Treasures*, has its liturgical counterpart in the Syriac tradition of the *bema*, separating male and female believers during worship. This may shed new light upon the practice in the synagogue of a physical barrier between the sexes, which may be older than the Middle Ages, as has been defended. The contributions by Nienke Vos and Els Rose exemplify the close connection between hagiography and liturgy with Greek and Latin case studies respectively. Nienke Vos takes two models developed over the past years that chart the mutual influence of narrative texts on saints and martyrs on the one hand and liturgical traditions (texts and rites) on the other. The models are then concretised with the case studies of the well-known stories of the martyrdom of Polycarp and of Perpetua and Felicitas. These texts, as Vos argues, have not only left their traces in the liturgy as such, but contain liturgical elements themselves. Hymns and prayers as well as occasional references to sacrifice and Eucharist must have made a strong emotional appeal to contemporary audiences. Els Rose examines the reception of apocryphal narratives in liturgical traditions of the early medieval West. Focusing on the liturgical texts for Mass from Old Spanish sources, she analyses the selection and transformation of central themes from the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*. Whereas the ascetic stories of Thomas' life, for which the apocryphal Acts are famous, recede into the background, the liturgical texts pay much attention to the story of Thomas' Christianisation of India. This element is in the apocryphal Acts imagined as the building of 'a heavenly palace', commissioned by the king but ultimately meant for the people in response to their conversion to a Christian way of life. A beautiful stained-glass window documents the importance of Thomas for medieval Christianity.

In the period that marks the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance stands the towering figure of Gabriel Biel, theologian, priest, and Brother of the Common Life. In the final contribution to this first section, Paul van Geest scrutinises Biel's little studied explanation of the Canon of Mass (*Canonis Missae Expositio*), a work of combined academic and pastoral character. In this work, Biel shows himself less optimistic about the human will than in his other, more purely academic works. Although closely related to the *Devotio Moderna*, Biel emphasises the weakness of will and of memory: man tends to forget his sins, whereas purification can only take place together with memoria.

3 Rituals

In part II, the volume shifts from textual studies and turns to the significance of liturgy as it expresses itself in rituals and the understanding of ritual acting. The section includes a variety of ritual aspects of the liturgy, including the performance of the sacraments and the persons selected to celebrate; the division of time and the related demarcation of religious communities; the liturgical celebration of relics; the role of images and other media, including digital media; and, finally, the counter-ritual of the Black Mass.

The section opens with a historiographic study by Willemien Otten in which she analyses the influence of the seventh-century patristic author Maximus Confessor, an important representative of Greek Eastern theology, on twentieth-century modernity and its approach to theology and liturgical studies. Otten points to the increasing influence of Maximus Confessor on Catholic theology from the *nouvelle théologie* onwards (De Lubac, von Balthasar), but wonders in what way this revival has done justice to the dynamics of Maximus himself, especially in his conception of liturgy or, as Otten describes it, his *liturgisches Anliegen*. The cosmic worldview can only be experienced via the liturgy.

Rituals are closely connected to ministry. The much discussed issue of early Christian ministry is taken up by Bart Koet in an analysis of the work of Ignatius of Antioch. Ignatius is oftentimes considered an early witness to an exclusively threefold ministry, but the close reading of his writings as done by Koet brings to light that the perception of a twofold ministry of bishop and deacons was present in Ignatian thought as well. In spite of attempts by modern scholars to harmonise this important writer with later ecclesiastical practice, Koet underlines the importance of the deacon in Ignatius' work.

Sacred time and sacred space come together in liturgy, while at the same time different ideas about significant divisions of ritual time are notable markers of religious communities. This is illustrated by Harald Buchinger who discusses the complicated relationship between the quartodeciman celebration of Easter (on the 14th of Nissan, as in Judaism) in Christian circles, and their Jewish antecedents. Since the beginning of the Easter celebration marks the end of the extended preparatory period of fasting, the differences between dominical and quartodeciman paschal traditions may have their origin in divergent theological views, but at the same time they have their most visible repercussion in ritual practice, particularly in the rituals of fasting. In this aspect, the diversity of the early Christian traditions seems to be more significant than modern attempts to find uniformity suggest.

The ritual importance of relics is brought forward in a dual presentation by Charles Caspers and Louis van Tongeren, who study the degree to which liturgical feast-days developed in the later Middle Ages on the basis of the presence of physical relics in a given community. Caspers and Van Tongeren use the city of Utrecht as a prism to study the broader question of the relation between feasts and relics. Rituals do not arise out of the blue, they argue. It is the presence of physical relics—and hence of the saint him or herself—that occasions the presence of a new feast on the calendar.

Ritual space and practice are also central in Ilia Rodov's contribution on the role of images in the synagogue. Liturgical studies cannot dispense with a serious approach to images and the role of the figurative in ritual. A special kind of ritual images are the *shiviti* plates, on which the Name of God features and which are essential for the prayer in the synagogue. Rodov studies this visual material in Romanian synagogues and shows how these images yield a visual experience and as such make the service transcend a mere auditory realm. Rodov's contribution documents this Eastern-European Jewish practice with lavish illustrations.

A kind of counter-ritual is introduced by Ruben van Luijk who presents the Black Mass as a neglected aspect of liturgy. In a curious irony, the sacrilegious character of the black Mass testifies to the importance of sacred ritual. Van Luijk employs the theory developed by the anthropologist Rappaport with regard to sanctification. By doing so, he is able to demonstrate the paradoxical character of the black Mass as a witness to the "strength of sanctification" of the ritual of Mass, and as a sacrilegious response called forth by the sacred itself. In that sense, Van Luijk argues, it is more worthwhile to study the sacrilegious as a counterpart of the sacred than as merely profane. Whether the sacrilegious rituals of the black Mass were a product of popular fantasy (attribution) or were performed in reality, is one of the main riddles at hand.

The section on rituals closes with a contribution by Gerard Lukken, who shows that liturgy does not only have a venerated history but also became a bone of contention in Catholic circles following Vatican II. Lukken approaches liturgical practice in the post-Vatican II period from the triangle of time, space, and actants in order to study the tensions in this field between traditionalist and innovative reform movements. Extreme traditionalists advocate a return to pre-conciliar practice, whereas reformers consider the innovations of Vatican II as a mere first step towards more encompassing renewal. Taking his point of departure in a semiotic approach and studying liturgy from the perspective of human expression, Lukken draws both from research and from personal memory to describe the developments in Roman-Catholic liturgical practice after Vatican II and, at the same time, to give an evaluation of divergent views on liturgical celebration in present-day communities.

4 Encounters

The third and final section of the book engages with encounters and, thereby, reflects a crucial element of Gerard Rouwhorst's scholarly career: to cross the borders of his own discipline and to get in touch with specialists of religions other than the Christian religion that was initially his main concern. The section comprises studies of the relations between Christians and non-Christians through history, and includes contributions that study the dialogues between different liturgical languages and media.

The relation between Christians and Jews in the early ages of Christianity is a topic discussed by Elisabeth Boddens Hosang, Joshua Schwartz and Clemens Leonhard. Elisabeth Boddens Hosang studies the daily interactions between Jews and Christians, taking council texts as her main source. The focus Boddens Hosang chooses is the sharing of meals and gifts of food between representatives of both religions. She concludes that, in spite of official religious prohibitions from both sides, the council regulations unequivocally indicate that such interaction in fact took place on a regular basis. Daily interaction between Jews and Christians can be documented in plays and gambling practices as well. Joshua Schwartz points to issues of gender, location (indoor-outdoor) and moral condemnation with regard to children at play, and documents Rabbinic and Patristic differences in opinion about children's plays. Whether Jewish and Christian children ever played together remains the question. A third contribution on the relations between Jews and Christians is by Clemens Leonhard who focuses on liturgical practice in a stricter sense. A cherished conviction among liturgists concerns the supposed relationship between the Christian Pentecost and a Jewish feast of renewal of the Covenant at Shavuot. Thunder and lightning at Mount Sinai may correspond to the fire and wind of Pentecost leading to a renewal of the Torah "for all peoples". Leonhard's painstaking research of the relevant sources shows, however, that no evidence exists for a Jewish feast of annual renewal of the covenant. Hence Pentecost neither continues nor replaces a Jewish feast of renewal of the Covenant.

Relations between Christians and the 'other from within' are central in the contribution by Daniela Müller. Müller focuses on purity as a driving force of religion which lends itself especially as a tool to study groups in medieval Christianity that were labelled heretics. Here, not dialogue and interaction, but outright accusation of perverse behaviour is the parole. Although heresy concerns the soul, Müller argues that the body was supposed to have an active part in it as well. Contagion and isolation become the keywords to describe the attitude towards the heretic.

Finally, two contributions on ritual-liturgical media complete this section on encounters. Paul Post investigates the performance of Christian rituals through modern media (TV, internet) and studies how early Christian notions of secrecy grafted onto the early Christian practice of *disciplina arcani* do or do not play a role in such media of the modern era. Post concludes with an exploration of the Network Society, studying to what extent the notion of an inner circle of initiates is relevant in the Network's core business of spreading information. With the final contribution, the significance of languages in encounters with other liturgical traditions comes to the fore. Bert Groen uses language as a guiding principle to differentiate between the many Eastern churches. He offers a small phenomenology of liturgical language, bringing to the fore the relationship between language and silence. This underlines, on the one hand, the necessity to renew venerated liturgical language and, on the other, the central notion and experience of sacred language as the vehicle to transcendence.

In an article in the Dutch newspaper *Trouw* Gerard Rouwhorst characterised the work of his mentor and predecessor Herman Wegman by pointing out that the latter considered Christian rituals and feasts not as historical facts to be assessed almost separately from other data. According to Wegman, these objects of study had to be situated in a broader cultural context. In this approach, Rouwhorst found an explanation for the fact that many of Wegman's publications were widely read and appreciated beyond the circle of liturgical scholars and church historians.⁹ Unconsciously or even consciously, Rouwhorst outlined in this passage not only the point of departure which he had chosen for his own research, as already noted above, but also the reception of his own scholarly work. The essays contained in this volume testify that Rouwhorst's contributions to the history of liturgy have earned him great appreciation. They also testify how the involvement with Liturgical Studies in its broadest and most interdisciplinary sense has made possible numerous encounters, through which we met Gerard Rouwhorst as a true friend and colleague, and for which we are sincerely grateful.

9 G. Rouwhorst, "Een adieu aan kerk en liturgie/ Herman Wegman 1930-1996," in *Trouw. De verdieping*, 4 March 1996. <<http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5009/Archief/article/detail/2542079/1996/03/04/Een-adieu-aan-kerk-en-liturgie-Herman-Wegman-1930---1996.dhtml>> (last consulted 29 September 2016).